PwC, MI6 & BILL FAIRCLOUGH'S MISSING MEMOIRS

Bill Fairclough photographed in Yarm, England in 1974

Between 1969 and 1983, Bill Fairclough worked for Coopers & Lybrand, formerly known as Cooper Brothers, now PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), one of the world's largest accountancy firms. During that same period, few if any of his colleagues suspected that he was leading a double life. Besides auditing balance sheets and profit and loss accounts, he was simultaneously operating covertly as an agent for MI6 and the CIA. His disclosures about his dual existence were, and remain to this day, unprecedented.

Most of the locations he worked in such as London, Nassau, Miami, Port au Prince, Grand Turk, New York, Chicago and Toronto supposedly coincidentally yet fortuitously offered credible and convenient cover for much of his clandestine work at the time.

About 40 years after leaving Coopers & Lybrand, in May 2022, PwC's UK Campaigns Manager, Diwa Sharma, reached out to Bill Fairclough with what seemed a straightforward request: would he feature in the firm's upcoming *"Showcase Your Story"* summer alumni newsletter? The brief was routine enough. All he had to do was answer typical life-style questions (reproduced below in his memoirs). The trouble was though that so far as he was concerned, answering typical life-style questions was complicated!

As discussions about the article unfolded, it became clear that news about Bill Fairclough's dual career had drawn a considerable amount of curiosity within PwC's ranks which prima facie appears to be why PwC approached him. His long-concealed involvement with Western intelligence agencies during his years at Coopers & Lybrand (and afterwards) fascinated many and not just those who knew or knew of him. Several drafts of the memoirs were exchanged, refined and finally approved by all involved with their preparation. The memoirs were ready to go … until, mysteriously, they weren't.

PwC withdrew the proposed feature article before it ever appeared in print or online. The approved memoirs simply disappeared a tad too late in the day to make sense. Logically albeit cynically, one might ask if there were people in PwC, perhaps with links to intelligence agencies, whose sole interest was to get Bill Fairclough to prepare his memoirs so that they could see his answers to those penetrating questions and then abort publication.

From a corporate governance perspective, you would be forgiven for thinking that a firm like PwC should have foreseen the host of potential problems inherent in publishing a former employee's memoirs bearing in mind he was a self-self-proclaimed spy. Ergo, PwC should never have entertained the idea of publishing his memoirs in the first place … no matter how interesting they were. What would Russian or Ukrainian clients think if all their secrets were exposed to spies unwittingly employed by PwC but intentionally planted by warring countries' intelligence agencies?

These sorts of concerns are by no means limited to warring factions and it is of note that virtually anyone can access these "alumni showcases" or obtain copies thereof. A good proportion of PwC's alumni work for PwC's clients and those clients include international conglomerates. They would have had concerns about how many more spies were in PwC's employ. Were there spies auditing their accounts, providing them with strategic advice, giving them international tax advice or investigating their planned cross-border acquisitions and mergers.

So, why did PwC finally suppress Bill Fairclough's memoirs? A PwC report (GDPR SAR 25:84) dated 14 October 2025 in response to a UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) - Subject Access Request dated 1 October 2025, states that on 9 May 2024 an unidentified person in PwC wrote "I don't think it would be a sensible choice to profile him – as interesting as his life is … [because] drawing attention to his spy career seems like it could open a door to reputational damage …".

In 2024 PwC was the second largest accountancy/audit firm in the world after Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu. In this legal document (GDPR SAR 25:84) PwC state without qualification that Bill Fairclough's "spy career" was an established fact and that publication of his memoirs could expose PwC to reputational risk. PwC's statement acknowledges not only Bill Fairclough's notability but also the notability of his disclosures about his dual career in finance and intelligence which if published by PwC might materially affect its reputation. Precisely why it took PwC so long to reach that obvious conclusion remains a conundrum.

Whatever the motive, Bill Fairclough's unpublished PwC memoirs remain a small but revealing episode in a much larger, stranger narrative; one where the spheres of global financial businesses and intelligence agencies converge in plain sight. His disclosure of his covert activities while simultaneously working high up in Coopers & Lybrand, Citigroup, Barclays and Reuters raises a multitude of serious issues that few in business have even thought about.

For the record, and in the interests of transparency and historical accuracy, we have reproduced below the final version of Bill Fairclough's memoirs that PwC chose not to publish.

BILL FAIRCLOUGH'S UNPUBLISHED PwC MEMOIRS

From 1969 to 1983 Bill Fairclough was employed by Cooper Brothers and Coopers & Lybrand working in their offices in Newcastle upon Tyne, Middlesbrough, London, Nassau (Bahamas), Miami and New York. (Cooper Brothers' Newcastle practice adopted the name Coopers & Lybrand a while after Cooper Brothers merged with Lybrand, Ross Bros. & Montgomery.) Thereafter Bill worked in the regulated international financial services sector, inter alia, as a Vice President in Citigroup and as a Director in the Reuters and Barclays Bank groups. Throughout much of his

career, Bill also undertook covert assignments specialising in infiltration and investigatory operations for British and other intelligence agencies.

What are you up to now?

In November 2022 I finally retired as Non-Executive Chairman for FaireSansDire which has now ceased trading. I established it in 1978 with "a little help from my friends". It was a niche UK based intelligence organisation which in its latter years operated on a pro bono basis. It was an unusual loose knit association and its members, called associates, used to operate on the basis of mutual trust as they had no contractual ties with the organisation thereby pre-empting most sorts of potential conflicts of interest, breaches of contracts et al.

When I worked at Coopers I was told that on occasion at least one partner was made aware on a classified "need to know basis" that I undertook clandestine work for British intelligence. For certain operations I was involved in that would have made sense. Those arrangements were never explained to me, and I was never told the names of the partners involved. Mind you, as I learnt at both Citigroup and Barclays, it is not unusual for the security services (not just in the UK) to seek the cooperation of leading global businesses when necessary.

In FaireSansDire's heyday our associates typically came from military intelligence, law enforcement or legal backgrounds and even included some judges. Over the decades these associates covertly represented FaireSansDire in over one hundred territories and the mainstay of FaireSansDire's activities was the investigation and infiltration of corrupt governments and international organised crime. My experience and training at Coopers in "all things audit" stood me in good stead to head up investigations into corruption et al.

Now that I am retired I will focus on preparing and finalising The Burlington Files series of spy novels with a view to making films based on them. The series comprises six autobiographical novels of which Beyond Enkription (intentionally misspelt) is the only novel published to date. It's a stand-alone thriller based on my real life experiences in the seventies in London, Nassau and Port au Prince pursuant to infiltrating an international organised crime gang while unwittingly working for MI6. In The Burlington Files series the pseudonym Porter Williams is used for Coopers and that of Edward Burlington for me.

What are your passions, and how have they impacted the direction of your career?

I am passionate about promoting integrity, honesty, accountability and transparency amongst politicians and responsible officials. Sadly, of late, I seem to be increasingly swimming against the tide along with King Canute! These values and a hunger for the truth were instilled into me by my parents, by my teachers at Red House School Stockton-on-Tees and St Peter's School York, and not least by colleagues and partners whom I worked with in Coopers. In hindsight I am glad I rigidly adhered to these principles notwithstanding the hidden costs of so doing including the unpleasant consequences of making powerful and perilous enemies who have demonstrated they would stop at nothing to try and silence me forever.

Who has been the greatest influence on you during your career?

(1) Colonel Alan Brooke Pemberton CVO MBE (Coldstream Guards and British Intelligence (MI5/6)) with whom I worked in the seventies and eighties and who along with Barrie Northend Parkes BEM (British Intelligence) helped me establish FaireSansDire. Barrie headed up my security for three decades until 2001 and was best man at my second wedding in 1996.

(2) From my days up North when at Cooper Brothers, Miles, Stanley and Trevor Middleton helped shape my future and when down South working in Coopers & Lybrand the same could be said of Sir Brandon Gough and Sir Brian Jenkins (who was a regular customer of my father's antiquarian book business).
(3) My father Dr Richard Fairclough (an executive at both Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) and British Intelligence (MI1)) originally suggested I should work for Coopers. He was one of the most intelligent people I have ever known. The former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan knew my father and held him in high regard too.

What is your fondest memory of your time at PwC?

Many fond memories spring to mind. In the seventies I worked in Coopers & Lybrand's Technical Department along with Keith Robinson and Peter Locke. One of our many challenging duties included advising partners how to deal with bizarre situations which explains why there were frequent peals of cacophonous laughter resonating from our offices in Abacus House, Gutter Lane. I recall on one occasion the partner responsible for the Church of England audit asked us whether he should qualify the church's accounts on a going concern basis. After familiarising ourselves with blasphemy law and much hilarious debate we said "no". Time has proven it was the right decision.

In the mid-seventies Coopers & Lybrand established its first International Executive Committee. Brandon Gough, being the CEO of the international firm of Coopers & Lybrand at the time, chaired the committee and appointed me as its first Secretary. The inaugural meeting was held at the Jockey Club in Miami. Senior partners attending brought along their wives, Brandon being accompanied by his wife Sarah. The three of us checked into the Jockey Club together. The Club manager first showed us around the suite assigned for the Goughs. He then handed me the door key and addressing Brandon directly said "I'll take you to your suite now."

In the late nineties I had invited some PwC partners to a rare celebratory lunch at Simpsons in The Strand, a restaurant coincidentally steeped in espionage history. One of the partners in attendance, being incredibly sharp eared for someone who I believe was ex-army, overheard one of the managers addressing me by an unfamiliar name. At the end of the lunch the partner with golden ears discreetly asked me whom should he thank for the wonderful lunch, Mr X or Mr Fairclough.

Finally, I will never forget this anecdote. Near the time of the formation of Coopers & Lybrand, Cooper Brothers' prospective US and Canadian partners requested that Cooper Brothers change the address of their head office in Abacus House in "Gutter Lane, Cheapside" on the grounds that it would not impress their clients. Accordingly, Sir Henry Benson (the head of Cooper Brothers at the time) wrote to the Corporation of London (the City) requesting the lane be renamed Coopers Lane. They replied saying as we've been here longer than Coopers why don't you change your name to Gutter Brothers. It is rumoured that some years later when the Corporation was auctioning off old street signs, Coopers & Lybrand bought that of Gutter Lane.

Are you still in touch with any of your former colleagues?

Two types of former PwC colleagues spring to mind: my colleagues when I was at Coopers and those I knew as auditors when I worked for PwC clients such as Barclays Bank. I used to meet both types socially but sadly I am no longer in touch with that many as most I knew well have either passed on or are no longer in contact, but I remain contactable through social media.

What did you learn during your time at PwC that you still keep with you today?

No matter what you are checking always assess its accuracy, validity and completeness. In addition, never forget that "the devil is in the detail"; that adage seems to have become exponentially more pertinent of late.

What do you value most about the alumni network?

It's reassuring to know that partners and staff in PwC still care about the past and those who worked in PwC long ago. I do hope my somewhat maverick career path inspires others to become accountants. They can take it from me, it's not boring!

What three people would you invite to a dinner party?

Most likely some of those named above who influenced me most. I would ask them to explain what they knew that they never told me. However, if my choice were restricted to those living today I would invite Donald Trump, Richard Moore (MI6 Chief) and William Burns (Director of the CIA) to discuss truth and politics.

Where is your favourite holiday destination?

Miami Beach and the Caribbean albeit I have been advised not to visit some of my favourite spots in the Bahamas, the Turks & Caicos Islands and Haiti where I used to work with Coopers & Lybrand. All three territories (airspace included) are best currently avoided by me because of what is now in the public domain about my involvement in investigating allegations of governmental corruption and organised crime; similar considerations apply to quite a few other countries.

What would be your motto?

For almost fifty years our motto at FaireSansDire was "Assume nothing, Believe nobody, Check everything" (ABC). Applying it has saved my life more than once. Furthermore, we have a family motto, "Faire sans dire", which translated means "To do without saying".

What have your learnings from lockdown been?

Be wary of taking things for granted including good health and be flexible, open minded and careful when planning ahead. Why? More tales of the unexpected are likely to unfold after Covid-19 and the Russo-Ukrainian war, both of which may still have a long way to go.

The PwC Report (GDPR SAR 25:84) may be accessed via this link.

This article was first published here on 25 October 2025.

For more news please visit the news page at Faire Sans Dire.